

Temerate by **The Readers Muse**

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Summary: "Brings me back to old times..."

Temerate

Disclaimer: I don't own "Stranger Things" or any of its characters, wishful thinking aside.

Authors Note #1: Anon asked for some Jopper: "How about some pre-relationship cuddling on the sofa?" – I ended up with high-school era jopper and angst so I think that means I owe them another fic.

Warnings: high school-era, unresolved sexual tension, alcohol, angst, drunkenness, mild language, mild sexual content, romance, drama.

Temerate

Lonnie was a goddamned jackass.

That was the only thing he was really thinking as he drove her home.

Seething, more like it.

She was wrapped up in his coat, looking painfully small and so much like *his* that it made his heart hiccup in his chest. Fighting to keep his eyes on the blacktop as it sleeted like a son of a bitch. The roads were slick and the visibility was worse. Hating himself for not being able to say no, even now. With most of his shit packed in boxes and the stern line of his father's mouth turning down every time he slipped another five dollar bill into his mother's hand and asked her to add the stack to the others the neighbor's kid was bringing down to Boston next month.

He thought he was over this part.

The part that'd wanted her since middle school.

Ever since she'd looked at him with those dark eyes and whispered secrets in his ear.

Bumming smokes under the side steps.

Talking about everything and nothin' as the teachers tried and failed to separate them every time.

"He's no good, Joyce," he said finally. Fingers tightening around the steering wheel as the tires angled through a black-ice turn onto her street. Still mad as hell - at Lonnie *and* her. Unable to get the image out of his head from when he'd found her on the side of the road. Shivering and almost blue, in nothing but a blue and white stripped skirt and her older brother's hand-me-down sweater.

"I know," she answered dully, hands emerging from the warm of his sleeves to fumble with a cigarette and lighter. Shaking back the snow-wet feathers of her hair until she taken a good long drag, before hitting him with the rest. "But he isn't leaving. Not the way you are, anyway."

Anger rose thick in the back of his throat.

"Leaving Hawkins, Joyce. Not you," he snapped. Pushing his hair back as the sound of distant sirens edged the mood toward eerie. Able to taste the anxiety she was leeching as a muscle in her cheek pulled tight like a tell. "Christ, I asked you to come with me, didn't I?"

He had.

More than once.

To just get the hell out of this shit town and start fresh somewhere else.

No parents.

No doctors.

No pills.

No Lonnie.

No one to look down on them for being young and stupid.

Just them.

Just like they'd always planned.

"You know I can't," she warbled, losing something in the rough of his

jacket collar as she pressed it against her lips. "Mom can barely take care of herself, let alone the twins. If I leave, there'll be no one to take care of them. Least until they can take care of themselves."

He braked in front her house hard. Refusing to feel bad when it jerked her forward. Hating the part of him that still wanted to punish her. To hold her accountable for everything going to shit on them—even though the other part of him knew she'd never really had a chance.

"You promised," she whispered softly. Like she was about to cry. Only it came out sullen and waspish. Reminding him of the way she'd flipped her hair at the Snow Ball during their senior year. Back when he'd finally got up his courage to ask her to dance. Telling him with out words that he was too late. Not even giving him a second to find his tongue before Lonnie was suddenly there. Leering at him with a triumphant look over her shoulder. Making sure he saw every god damn bit as the bastard whirled her around and kissed her soundly. Leaving him alone in the corner with the hair clip she'd been eying for months in a little box in his suit pocket. The one he crushed to bits under his heel the moment he got home. Swearing a blue streak as the salt-sting of tears made him drive his fist through the bathroom mirror. Shattering it into a million fractured pieces.

"Some of us just can't leave everything behind like you can, Hop," she offered as she reached for handle. Street lights barely illuminating the slick of ice that led all the way up the path to her front porch.

I never wanted to, he thought silently. Inhaling the tart of trailing chemicals and filter-burnt nicotine as she tossed her cigarette into the snow. Too far away to hear the hiss.

The moment lingered.

Neither of them ready to say goodbye.

And Christ, wasn't that the truth?

Because this was what that was, wasn't it?

The end.

He left for Boston the next day.

"Come in for a bit?" Joyce offered suddenly, hand loose around the handle as she turned to look at him. The shadows punching dark, premature lines under her eyes as her next exhale chilled condensation through the close space. "Mom and the twins aren't home."

He opened his mouth to say no, but she beat him to it.

"Please, Hop?"

He hated how weak he was for that.

For her.

He'd never met anyone that could make him heel like she could.

A gust of wind shivered through the half-open door. Sticking snow flakes to her eyelashes as the entire world stuck itself in some sort of middle ground he just wasn't prepared for. Watching her watch him as he slowly turned the engine off and grunted out a yes. Stuck on the small, hopeful way her lips tugged upwards when he undid his seat-belt and leveled her with a look he hoped was more steady than it felt on his face.

"Just for a couple minutes," he warned.

He was sitting on the couch, fighting off the urge to shiver as she tossed a couple logs in the fireplace and lit some tinder. Nose twitching as the competing scents of singed pine and fresh gasoline flared up, then slowly subsided. He couldn't remember the last time the heat had worked right in the place. Not even if there was anything extra left at the end of the month to try and fix it.

"When do you leave tomorrow?" she asked quietly, knees popping as she straightened. A mess of wet hair and small bones as the flare of his coat around her thighs threatened to swallow the rest of her.

"Three fifteen," he answered. Hand ghosting the side pocket of his sweater where the ticket was. Reassuring himself it was still there.

"My old man changed his mind about letting me have the old ford."

She snorted, tucking her hair behind her ear as she poked at the fire with the toe of her boot. Making sure everything was lit before she pulled the grate closed. Setting the atmosphere of the room on edge when the rusty whine pierced through the quiet.

"Of course he did. What an asshole."

She wasn't wrong.

But he clamped down on the smile that wanted to join hers regardless.

That was the last thing he needed.

"Want some?" she asked, grinning with teeth as the half-full bottle of bourbon sloshed around when she took it out of the cupboard above the oven. Having to get onto her tip-toes to reach as her skirt threatened to rise up with the rest of her. Not waiting for an answer as she pulled two glasses out of the cupboard and settled down on the couch beside him.

He watched the dark-amber stain the sides of the glass. Thinking real hard about saying no until- *somehow*- she was pressing the glass into his hand and he was knocking it back along with her. Watching her barely grimace at the kick. Impressed all over again, just like he'd been the first time they'd done this. Only this time with a healthy amount of concern latched onto it.

They'd never exactly been the poster kids for good choices, but somewhere along the line Lonnie had changed her. It went without saying that he didn't like it. Not one god damned bit of it.

"Take it easy, Joyce," he rasped, feeling the burn in the back of his throat as he bit down on the urge to cough.

She just rolled her eyes and topped up his glass. Raising hers in a toast as she stood on legs that wobbled only a little bit. Eyes angry, dark and afraid as she waited for him to do the same. Bringing their glasses together with a dangerous sound before tossing back what was left like it was water.

"To the rest of your life, Jim Hopper."

He still left for Boston the next afternoon, just like he'd planned to.

Just like Joyce knew he would even as she'd kissed him all sweet and slow that morning. Twisting warm, honied shadows against the wall as dawn started crackin' through the blinds. Sunk so thick in her smell that if he closed his eyes, even hours later, he'd figured he'd still be able find her on his skin.

There'd been a lump in his throat bigger than a semi-trailer when he'd tossed himself into one of those awful bucket seats. The ones that smelled like sweat and stale everything as the bus driver stepped out of the station still doing up his belt. Refusing to look anyone in the eye until they were safely outside of Hawkins and everyone in it as the bourbon from the night before ate a hole in his stomach like it was a stand in for something else.

He didn't call her like she'd asked when he finally made it.

Telling himself it was better this way.

A clean break.

It was a clever lie that almost had him fooled until months later, when he heard through the grapevine that Lonnie had come crawling and she'd eventually taken him back. Just like he knew she would. Figuring that was the end of that as he threw himself into training. Determined to prove himself as the big wigs slowly started to take notice.

But for some reason, even when he was holding Diane's hand at the altar - listening to the preacher talk about God and the sanctity of marriage as the echoes haunted the run-down eves - somehow he knew that wasn't the end of their story.

He'd promised, after all.

A/N: This story is now complete. Thank you for reading, please let me know what you think.

Reference:

- temerate: to break a bond or promise.